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Chair

The Honourable Maxime Bernier

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• (1530)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC)): I would like to welcome everyone to the Standing Committee on National Defence. This is our 30th meeting. Today, pursuant to the agenda and Standing Order 108(2), we are continuing our study of the next generation of fighter aircraft.

Our witnesses today are from the Department of National Defence. We will have the honour of hearing from Lieutenant-General Deschamps, Chief of the Air Staff, and Colonel Dave Burt, Acting Project Manager, Next Generation Fighter Capability.

Thank you and welcome.

[English]

So, *monsieur*, you have about ten minutes to do your presentation, and after that all members will have the floor. It's up to you. Thank you very much.

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps (Chief of the Air Staff, Department of National Defence): *Merci, monsieur le président.* Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the high-level mandatory capabilities for Canada's next-generation fighter aircraft.

[Translation]

You recently had the opportunity to hear from Mr. Dan Ross, our Assistant Deputy Minister (Materiel), concerning the process being used to procure the F-35 as the best price, best capability and, thus, best-value fighter for Canadians under the MOU signed by the Joint Strike Fighter Program partners. I will therefore focus specifically on Canada's requirements—and the extensive analysis of options—for the fighter we will use for the next 30 to 40 years.

[English]

As I noted previously before this committee, manned fighters are essential to our ability to maintain control and sovereignty over our airspace, whether in Canada or during operations abroad. Neither unmanned aerial vehicles nor any other air platform can carry out this demanding and complex task, whether they are operating in air-to-air or air-to-ground roles. This is the same conclusion reached by many of Canada's allies.

Following the announcement of the government's intent to acquire a next-generation fighter in the Canada First defence strategy, we examined our requirements very closely and finalized them in early 2010. We looked at future and current roles and missions that our next-generation fighter would be responsible for and the environment—both physical and threat—in which it would be operating.

• (1535)

[Translation]

We need a capability that helps us carry out our core missions of defending the sovereignty of Canadian and North American air space through NORAD, providing Canada with an effective and modern capability for international operations, and effectively conducting joint operations with our allies through NATO or a coalition.

We need robust aircraft, capable of operating across Canada's vast geography and under harsh and varying weather conditions and deterring challenges to Canadian sovereignty.

[English]

Because we cannot afford to acquire and operate multiple, specialized fighter fleets, tomorrow's fighter aircraft must be capable of undertaking a variety of air-to-air and air-to-surface combat roles. In a more generic sense, the fighter must be capable of undertaking whatever defence role we demand of it, whether that is a northern sovereignty patrol, an intercept role, war-fighting, surveillance, or anything else.

Furthermore, to be prepared for the future, the aircraft must be flexible enough to deal with threats and missions that were unexpected at the time of its conception. We know that some of the threats faced by the CF-18 in the late 20th century have faded, some have continued, and new ones have emerged. There is no reason for us to doubt that we will continue to see similar fluidity and evolution in threats as this century unfolds. We assume that technology will continue to evolve on various fronts, such as data processing, threat detection, weapons systems, self-defence suites, and interoperability, to give just a few examples.

Specifically, our short list of high-level mandatory capabilities, which are qualitative and not quantitative in nature, comprise the following characteristics.

Range: the aircraft must have the range to be capable of deploying in NORAD and NATO alert configurations, in accordance with instrument flying rules without air-to-air refuelling support, whether the aircraft is flying non-stop from a main operating base to a deployed operating base or from a main operating base to a forward operating location with one stop en route if required.

Endurance:

[Translation]

The aircraft must have the endurance to be capable of operating from a main operating base, a deployed operating base or a forward operating location in accordance with instrument flying rules and maintain a combat air patrol in accordance with Canadian Forces, NORAD and NATO requirements.

[English]

Speed: our next fighter must have the speed to be capable of successfully conducting an intercept of air-breathing threats—that is to say, non-ballistic threats such as fighters or bombers—to Canadian airspace or to airspace assigned to the Canadian Forces in accordance with NORAD and NATO standards.

[Translation]

Air-to-air refueling: The fighter must be capable of receiving fuel in flight to extend its range and endurance.

[English]

Deployability: our next fighter must be capable of deploying to and operating from forward operating locations domestically and worldwide in a full range of geographic, environmental, climatic, and threat conditions.

Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance: the fighter must be capable of providing non-traditional intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance data before, during, and following the deployment of weapons. This capability will assist targeting, intelligence, and command entities in a variety of decision-making processes.

Weapons: the aircraft must precisely deliver a range of air-to-air and air-to-surface weapons in all weather conditions, day and night, and in permissive and non-permissive environments to provide a spectrum of tailored weapons effects.

Survivability:

[Translation]

The aircraft must be capable of defending itself by employing a range of self-defence technologies and minimizing the risk of detection, engagement and damage in predicted threat environments.

[English]

Growth potential: the aircraft must be capable of continuous upgrade to its level of interoperability, survivability, and operational capabilities for the duration of its lifetime.

Fleet size: the fleet must be large enough to conduct assigned missions and roles while simultaneously maintaining combat-ready force generation capability—that is, training new crews and maintenance of aircraft.

Certification:

[Translation]

The aircraft must be capable of certification and sustainment in accordance with Canadian standards.

[English]

Delivery: the delivery times must give us the capability of achieving an initial operating capability of the new aircraft,

coordinated with the CF-18 Hornet's end of lifetime. In other words, the new fighter must begin delivery in 2016 to allow overlap with the Hornet's projected retirement in 2020, and thus avoid a gap in our defence capabilities by ensuring that such needs as trained crews are ready to go. In procurement terms, that is almost tomorrow.

• (1540)

[Translation]

The analysis of the quantitative mandatory requirements associated with these high-level mandatory capabilities for Canada's next fighter made it clear that only a fifth generation fighter could satisfy our mission needs in the increasingly complex future security environment.

[English]

The F-35 Lightning II is the only aircraft that meets our mandatory requirements and the only fifth-generation aircraft available to Canada. The fifth-generation F-22 Raptor is an excellent air superiority fighter that is being upgraded through the addition of selected capabilities that have found their origins in the F-35. However, the United States government does not permit foreign sales. Russia has a fifth generation under development, and China is expected to do the same.

Three key capabilities distinguish a fifth-generation fighter from a fourth-generation fighter.

[Translation]

First, interoperability—a unique combination of stealth, long-range high-resolution sensors and security high-capacity networks that allow aircraft to communicate with one another and share data in a secure environment.

[English]

Secondly, sensors and data fusion: a system that consolidates tactical information from the sensors and off-board sources to provide pilots with a clear understanding of the tactical situation at a glance.

Thirdly, survivability: that is very low observable stealth, advanced sensors, a comprehensive self-defence suite, and secure data link that mean a fifth-generation aircraft can accomplish more in a mission with fewer supporting assets.

It is important to be clear that a fourth-generation aircraft cannot be upgraded to a fifth-generation aircraft. You cannot turn a fourth-generation CF-18, even a modernized version such as ours, into a fifth-generation stealth aircraft.

The F-35 Lightning II represents the revolutionary difference from previous generations of fighters in terms of capabilities, and it brings unique advantages. It brings stealth technology. Low observability will significantly reduce the aircraft's electromagnetic signature and therefore reduce detection by enemy sensor systems. It provides lower risk and improves survivability for the pilot, as well as enhanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities, all of which have significant relevance across the Government of Canada's defence priorities of national, continental, and international operations. It possesses advanced sensor and data fusion technology that will gather, synthesize, and display information to help pilots understand the tactical situation at a glance, make complex tactical decisions quickly, and take decisive action. The aircraft takes care of much of the data gathering and synthesis that pilots now have to do themselves and that has become almost overwhelming in its quantity and speed. In effect, the aircraft is the co-pilot.

[Translation]

We will have interoperability with our partners and allies that will be seamless, safe and effective within NORAD and NATO and on coalition operations.

[English]

The F-35 allows us to share its entire situational awareness with partner aircraft. When we go into operations abroad with like-minded coalition nations with the same platform, the aircraft are the same. Therefore, we can share resources and quickly go into an operation without weeks of training, because we have the same kit and software as our partners. It makes a big difference in how we're going to do business as a coalition.

Furthermore, the aircraft is sustainable. We will be able to replace lost aircraft, or acquire additional aircraft if the future global situation demands it, because the production line will operate until at least 2035. Software will be upgraded on an ongoing basis, and we will not have to contract individually for upgrades, bringing huge savings and keeping the aircraft up to date as technology evolves.

In conclusion, given the increasingly complex and uncertain future security environment, the F-35 Lightning II will provide Canada with the greatest probability of mission success and the greatest probability that our men and women will survive and return safely from their missions.

We are acquiring the F-35 Lightning II to protect Canadian interests and to counter tomorrow's threats. Procured and sustained through the JSF program, the F-35 is the best value for our taxpayer dollar and will keep Canada at the forefront of fighter operations, enabling our fleet to remain relevant, flexible, viable, and sustainable well into the middle of this century.

The F-35 Lightning II is not an unnecessary luxury. It is the right tool, at the best value, to properly do the job that Canada and Canadians want their air force to carry out on their behalf.

• (1545)

[Translation]

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. I would be happy to address any questions you have about the high level mandatory capabilities for our fighter.

[English]

Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Lieutenant-General Deschamps.

I will now turn the floor over to Mr. LeBlanc.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank General Deschamps and Colonel Burt for being here today.

General, thank you for your overview of the technical needs, which the parliamentary secretary presented in committee a month ago.

I know my colleagues also have questions to ask and there will be other rounds.

[English]

General, we were very concerned about the Auditor General's recent report with respect to the Chinook helicopters. I know you share that concern. I think the minister certainly expressed his concern clearly on seeing the Auditor General's report, as well as his acceptance of her analysis and his commitment to ensuring that the air force does better in subsequent procurements.

In the Chinook helicopter procurement, one of her criticisms, as you know, was the escalation of costs because of modifications and changes that were made after the initial decision to proceed. She identified a number of steps at which the costs ended up almost doubling and she identified a lot of the responsibility for that around changes that were made during the process. She also commented that the ongoing support costs weren't properly calculated, and she identified perhaps a billion dollars that the defence department may have to reassign for having underestimated the cost of operating the Chinooks.

The Chinooks were an operating aircraft. The F-35 certainly is not as familiar as the Chinook helicopters might be. What reassurances can you give us, General, that with respect to the F-35 purchase—which is much more expensive than the Chinook purchase—some of those mistakes won't be repeated?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: I'll ask my colleague, Colonel Burt, to address the cost controls within the JSF program with our coalition partners. He can probably provide some of those answers for you.

Col Dave Burt (Acting Project Manager, Next Generation Fighter Capability, Department of National Defence): Thank you very much for the question.

There are cost controls within our participation in the MOU. Perhaps I should go back to some basics, because I'm not sure that's clearly understood.

This committee has been told that we will be procuring the aircraft through the MOU, and all our needs will be put forth to the JSF program office, together with those of all the other partners. Each year all of those needs are collectively negotiated with Lockheed Martin and the other prime contractors. Similarly, our sustainment costs will be actioned in a collective way. So we will not be acting unilaterally; we will be acting collectively through the JSF program.

Through our participation in the JSF program we have visibility on all of the costs. The team from the JSF program office negotiates with the prime contractors led by Lockheed Martin. We have Canadians participating in that team as members of the JSF program office, and we also have observers.

Finally, before any of these contracts with Lockheed Martin are finalized for procurement or sustainment, the details of them are put back to the executive steering board on which we have a member who has an equal vote with all of the other partners, and a veto vote, in that the JSF executive steering board seeks unanimous agreement on all of these types of arrangements. Through that process we will be able to monitor and control the costs to Canada for the procurement and sustainment of the aircraft.

[Translation]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Colonel, then there are some of the problems she identified. For example, your review boards would have met to look at the escalating costs with respect to the Chinook, but that wouldn't apply in the case of the JSF acquisition because it would be sort of multinational, with the different partners working together. So some of the cost control mechanisms that were allegedly in place for the Chinooks and failed aren't even applicable to this purchase. We're participating with a larger group of people. I'm surprised that all of these measures are in place to control the costs, yet you're proposing to acquire something without even knowing the costs.

● (1550)

Col Dave Burt: There are a couple of issues that you've raised. First of all, there are mechanisms within the department, the senior review boards, that will still be applicable to the next-generation fighter capability project, but they will be applicable in a different context, as you have alluded to. To be frank, we have not yet determined how our participation in the JSF program will interact with the senior review boards and the other boards within the department. We are working on that process now. We set up the project management office two weeks ago. I'm making a big effort to try to expand my team to address all issues of that nature.

One of the other issues that we need to address is getting a clearer understanding of the costs as we advance to government for expenditure authority on the various elements of the project. We will be taking a team to the JSF program three weeks from now to seek further information, and we will be advancing our understanding of the sustainment costs through that process.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I don't have anywhere near the experience of you gentlemen in these issues, but I'm surprised that "advancing our understanding of the costs", as you said, would come after the minister decides to acquire the aircraft. Does that normally follow the acquisition decision ?

Col Dave Burt: You raise a good point. We have initial estimates to show that the costs of sustainment will be in the same range of what we currently pay for our current fighter aircraft. Based on that, and understanding the huge cost advantage of procuring through the JSF program and the MOU, and understanding our timeline to reach an initial operational capability prior to the end of our CF-18 capability, we need to start now. When we put all of those factors together, we advanced a recommendation that we start now.

[Translation]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Sir, I have another very quick question.

[English]

Have the requirements you outlined and the minister tabled a couple of weeks ago been made public before? Would other companies that make fighter jets have seen any of this information or heard of it before you read it into the record today?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: Thank you for the question.

As we were gaining insight into the program, the companies were exposed, through Colonel Burt's group, to some of those high-level requirements we were looking at as we developed the final requirements for the government. They were engaged at the exploratory stage, but not in the formal process, as we would for a request for proposal, which is a competitive process. We made sure we had a good understanding of what we saw as the high levels, and therefore shared that with those interested parties in the industry.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Bachand, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Lieutenant-General Deschamps, Colonel Burt.

The last time you appeared before this committee, I asked you a number of questions, and I'd like to go back to the one about internal simulations. I will repeat what I said last time. It has to do with Eurofighter, of course. They talk of simulations in which combat air patrols made up of four Typhoon aircraft, supported by an airborne warning and control system, the AWACS system, defeated JSF formations of eight aircraft 85% of the time.

I would like to know whether we have really bought the best aircraft. Further on, I note that other simulation series pitting the JSF in one-on-one scenarios against such similar modern aircraft such as the Su-35 or the J-10 "do not always end in a JSF victory". In answer to my question about access to the simulations, general, you said the content of the documents could not be disclosed because it was classified. I asked whether you meant they were censored, and you answered: "Of course. Since Canada does not own the information...".

I would like to know who owns the information. Is it Lockheed Martin?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: The three owners are part of the U.S. government, since it purchased or subsidized the aircraft.

As for your question on simulations, I am not going to comment on what a rival company claims to have done in a simulation. I cannot understand how they got access to it. In terms of the simulation the company used, I'm not sure what it used to build its simulation model, since that is not shared. They can announce whatever they like, I cannot contradict them. I don't have access to whatever their claims of success are based on.

All I can say to you is that we and our partners have been analyzing everything there is out there for a number of years. We compare that to the aircraft's capability in a very detailed way. That's why it's modified for adaptability to future conditions.

I cannot tell you whether their claims are true or false because I don't really have access to what they have done, but I can tell you that, on our side, we have been studying that for almost 10 years in great detail and with the help of many experts. This fighter is still the most competitive in a dangerous and integrated environment, as you mentioned.

●(1555)

Mr. Claude Bachand: The last time you were here, I also asked you whether you had done one-on-one or group combat simulations of that kind. You answered: "Absolutely. We have done a lot of simulation activities, both as part of the JSF program with other partner nations and unilaterally."

Were those one-on-one or group combat simulations? And, in either case, could you tell us if you won?

[English]

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: Do you want to speak to simulation?
[Translation]

Colonel Burt is one of my experts. He has used the simulator many times. He can give a more detailed answer.

[English]

Col Dave Burt: Thank you for the question.

As I described to the committee when I last met with you, we have had a number of opportunities over the past years to do simulation exercises as a partner in the JSF program. We have also done some unilateral simulation, all at a very highly classified level.

In those simulations we have looked at a range of different adversaries and different combinations of those adversaries. One thing that has been made very clear to Canadians and the Canadians involved in this process is that the types of capabilities that are available with the F-35 are needed to meet the requirements that have been spelled out by the director of air requirements and approved by the process within the department. Those capabilities are needed explicitly for the defence of Canada and the cooperative defence of North America.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Right. If I understand correctly, we are trying to determine whether this is the best purchase. You know that the Bloc Québécois not opposed to the purchase of this aircraft; rather, we are interested in the resulting defence contracts. It would be more reassuring to us if we could be sure that the aircraft can come out on top in the theatre of operations.

If I understand correctly, you are simply asking us to make a leap of faith. If I have no access to the simulations, I cannot draw any comparisons.

What would you be prepared to do to challenge the simulation system that a competitor might come out with?

[English]

Col Dave Burt: I would do what I did in reaction to the article to which you are referring. In reaction to that, we consulted through the classified processes that we have at hand, and we confirmed that our understanding of the nature of dominance of the F-35 was indeed correct in the context of the details that were provided in that article.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand: So, legally, you consulted the classification process to see to what extent you could provide details. So, can we have the legal opinion to which you seem to be referring?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: Certainly.

I don't know where that question is leading us.

Simulation is an extremely technical aspect of our job. You asked how you can know that we know what we are doing. That is more or less insinuating that we don't know what we are doing.

We have proven in combat that we know what we are doing. So I am offended that you are implying that a job requiring technical experts has to be given to people who don't really know the business, so that they can conduct an assessment to make sure that we do know the business.

●(1600)

Mr. Claude Bachand: I do not know the business, but we are the ones—

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: Mr. Bachand, I don't know what you want.

Mr. Claude Bachand:—who authorize the expenditures.

The Chair: Mr. Bachand, you have 15 seconds remaining.

Mr. Claude Bachand: We are the ones authorizing the expenditures, general. So we are entitled to ask for details. This is going to cost \$15 billion.

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: Mr. Bachand, if I provide you with the simulation, do you have the computers to run it on? What we are doing is complex and technical. We are giving the government an opinion based on our expertise. Whether the government accepts it or not is up to the government. However, don't tell me that we don't know what we are doing when we are watching the simulation.

Mr. Claude Bachand: I never said that, General. I never said that.

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: Well, you implied it, Mr. Bachand.

Mr. Claude Bachand: We'll come back to this in the next round.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Harris

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, General Deschamps and Colonel Burt, for joining us and helping us with our deliberations.

There's no doubt in my mind that the F-35 is a capable airplane, and you've outlined some of the details of that today. Of course, what bothers me a little bit is what I heard the other day from the Auditor General, and this was a quote on the Chinook. In paragraph 6.53 of the Auditor General's report, she says:

By June 2006, based on meetings and discussions with Boeing and the market analysis, National Defence had formally concluded that Boeing's Chinook was the only existing Western certified helicopter in production capable of meeting its needs.

In another paragraph, she says that you kind of informally decided the same thing six months before. She also says that the actual statement of requirements wasn't developed until a couple of years later, but the decision had been made and approval was received in June 2006 to buy the Chinook. I have to say that bothers me. Maybe the Chinook was the best plane, but I understand there were others, and the Auditor General said that the others weren't given a chance to compete on the statement of requirements. The former director or ADM for materiel told us that there's a problem to some extent with in-house analysis reflecting in-house bias.

Those two things together beg the question of whether or not we're actually getting what we should be getting.

I say this in the context of the minister's response in the House of Commons in May, where the minister talked about there being:

...an open, competitive, transparent process that will see us receive the best capability, to provide that capability to the best pilots in the world.

He reiterated the fact that this JSF project was not interfering with that.

Given those concerns here, is the statement of requirements that was surely developed for the JSF project back when they started in 2000, or thereabouts...is the existence of that and Canada's work on this joint strike fighter project leading your organization to draft the statement of requirements around that F-35?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: Thank you for the question.

I'm not exactly sure what the core of your question is.

Mr. Jack Harris: Let me try to make it clear. We were told, first of all, that it was going to be an open competition, and then we were told a few months later that this was the only aircraft that would do the job. Either something happened in the meantime...and we're being told the competition actually took place 10 years ago and all of that. So the question really is this. The statement of requirements is supposed to be the starting point. That's what the Auditor General told us; that's what Alan Williams told us: you make your statement of requirements and decide what your needs are, and then you go looking for something to fill them.

That's apparently not what happened with the Chinook, for example. There's been some suggestion that it is not what happened with the search and rescue aircraft, that the statement of requirements was actually drafted to conform to an airplane. That's the suggestion.

The question then becomes, do we have a pattern here that causes us to question whether the cart was put before the horse here? We're involved with the joint strike fighter development program, and

therefore it's an easy step to decide that this is the only plane we need and we'll draft our statement of requirements around it. That, to me, would be putting the cart before the horse.

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: I'll try to answer your question as best I can.

Our participation in the joint strike fighter program, which dates back to the late nineties—

• (1605)

Mr. Jack Harris: It's a development program; that's right.

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: Initially, as has been pointed out, we were not committed to buying the airplane. That focus changed in 2008, when the government released the Canada First defence strategy, within which it identified the need to replace the CF-18s with a next-generation fighter. At that point, clearly we had the imperatives to now review our fighter programs and determine what the future needs were, since we had to replace our F-18. It was at that point, 2008 and onwards, that we went to the statement of requirement analysis to determine what the needs of the next-generation fighter were and therefore whether the JSF was the right aircraft for us as we looked at replacing the F-18.

That process started after the government announced its intention to replace the fleet in 2008. It is not something that was pre-ordained from 1998. The fact that we were interested in the technology that was being developed by the joint strike fighter...it was a national desire to make sure that we had opportunities in the future, should the government decide that this was the way it was going to go. For us it was a question, now that we had confirmation that we could replace the fleet, of looking ahead and saying fine, what are the threats, what are the missions for the next 30 or 40 years, and therefore what are the requirements we need to identify to government?

That is the process we followed, which culminated this year in a recommendation to government to procure the JSF.

Mr. Jack Harris: What I hear in that, though, is that using the term "next-generation fighter" in the Canada First defence strategy... For some reason, it was decided somewhere that the word "next-generation" had a meaning and that therefore the only plane we could acquire was a next-generation one, as opposed to a current one. That's what I hear in what you're saying.

That would obviously limit it. If there is only one next-generation fighter, then you'll have to buy this one. Is that the conclusion you reached?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: No, sir. The terminology "next-generation fighter" just represents the need to look ahead, given the longevity and duration that we will expect from this fighter fleet. I don't think it was linked to any particular aircraft at that time. The focus, though, was on future capabilities and agility. That is the underlying theme of "next-generation".

Mr. Jack Harris: In terms of future capabilities, of course, we were part of the MOU when we signed on. We signed on again in a 2006 MOU. That's a 45-year program. As you know, that MOU lasts 45 years, and Canada can participate in that MOU for as long as it wants.

Something you said in your statement today and the last time you appeared, when you made another statement in September on this, talking about the aircraft being sustained, is:

We will be able to replace lost aircraft—or acquire additional aircraft if the future global situation demands it—because the production line will operate until at least 2035.

That is for the next 25 years that these planes will be in production.

In terms of flexibility and capability, we have the ability to acquire either more of these planes or potentially some of these planes over the next 35 years. I say that because when we needed Chinooks for Afghanistan, we didn't get them by making them; we got them by acquiring them. We've used them and we're acquiring some now, but we won't have them until we're back from Afghanistan.

Could the same thing happen with these fighter jets? Could we acquire them if we actually need them and get the jets that we need now?

The Chair: Be brief, please.

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: The only reason we had an opportunity to get the Chinooks for Afghanistan is that our close ally and partner, the U.S. military, was generous enough to sell us some of their highly needed airplanes so that we could meet a critical need for Canada's Afghan mission. It doesn't mean that this kind of capability will always be there, because they have their own needs to meet. Fighters are not something that can be built overnight. Nobody buys surplus fighters; therefore, the expectation that we could at some future date decide that we would look to buy an airplane on short notice would probably be fraught with risk. We probably would not get what we want, when we want, and at the cost we want.

I believe the program we're in right now gives us the absolute best balance of flexibility for governments present and future to make decisions as things change around them. It's very tough to predict future environments. What we know is that it will be dangerous. Therefore, this program gives future governments the option of changing the ratio of fighters they want Canada to have to do its missions both at home and abroad.

Also, there's attrition. Typically when you buy fleets of aircraft you have to allow for loss of aircraft due to training, mechanical failures, and so on. In other programs you have to have almost prescient knowledge of how much you're going to lose over the life of a program. Traditionally, when you bought fighter fleets you would buy more or buy sufficiently that you could absorb losses and be able to continue to operate. As things get more and more expensive, it's difficult to buy more airplanes just in case we lose airplanes, whereas with this program we don't have to buy more airplanes than we actually need because the program allows us the flexibility to make that decision later, should we see attrition become an issue.

• (1610)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Lieutenant-General.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Hawn.

You have seven minutes.

[English]

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for coming.

Colonel Burt, I want to pick up on the simulation thing. Of course, we'd expect any company to have a simulation that shows that their equipment is the best. My question to you is, with regard to the classification level of the capabilities of the F-35, when people are making comparisons with other airplanes than the F-35, how would they know, given the classification level, what they're comparing it to?

Col Dave Burt: Mr. Chairman, that's an excellent question, and it's one of the things that perplexes us when we see a lot of things in the media or hear a lot of statements made publicly about the nature of their different capabilities against the F-35. All of the very advanced capabilities of the F-35 are at a very highly classified level. There are only a very small number of people in the world who are cleared to that level of classification and have the privilege of working with that kind of detail.

So indeed, how would they know?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you.

Talking about the F-35 operational capabilities and the advanced capabilities that it has, and obviously within the bounds of classification, "stealth" is a word that we throw around, but it doesn't seem to be well understood. Can you talk a little bit, briefly, about what that F-35 capability brings to us?

Col Dave Burt: With your permission, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to use a visual aid. These visual aids that I will use are available for public distribution. I will be able to leave them with you and give you other versions of them if you need them.

Stealth is one of those elements of the description of this capability that has been very difficult to describe. The details of it are at the very highly classified level. But at an unclassified level I can provide a characterization.

On the lower portion of the chart I am showing you, we have three bars. On the left side is the level of capability used as the baseline, and it's a first- to third-generation capability. What it describes is the vulnerability to lethal surface-to-air missile shots. If you have a fourth-generation with the kind of low observable enhancements that are currently available on the market, you are able to decrease the vulnerability to lethal surface-to-air missile shots by 15%. That is quite significant. However, the 95% reduction that is available from the fifth generation, from the F-35, is truly a game changer.

Across the top, the slide shows how the game actually changes. The red blob on the slide is the area of vulnerability. You can see that when you change by 15%, that blob decreases somewhat, but the 95% reduction that is available from the fifth-generation F-35 changes the game such that the flexibility and the chance of mission success and the chance of survival—being able to bring the aircraft home to fight another day—are hugely increased. That is the value of stealth.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you.

We've talked about system sensors and system fusion and all that kind of stuff. Some of the individual systems on the F-35 make me think about data link and the problems we had getting data link to work on the F-18. Could you talk about the data link on the F-35 and how that might be different?

Col Dave Burt: Thank you for that question.

Data link is indeed an interesting character. When I flew the F-18, one of the challenges we had was collating all the information, integrating it all together, and building what we called situational awareness in our mind in order to understand the tactical situation. The value of the data link system that we put on the F-18 is that all this information is integrated for us, and we're able to see the depiction of it.

The challenge we have with the data link on our current aircraft and other aircraft of that nature comes from the type of data link that it is. It's called omnidirectional. It transmits in all directions and it transmits with a constant power. In the case of certain threats against which we would fly, we would actually have to turn off the data link in exactly the timeframe when we would need it most: when we are trying to do the final attack on the target.

When you move into fifth generation and the nature of data link available there, the fifth-generation aircraft has sufficient knowledge in the aircraft to know exactly where the next aircraft in the chain is, and it directs the information and the data link only to that aircraft and only with sufficient power to transmit it to that next aircraft. In this way, the data link in a fifth-generation F-35 is considered high capability, high capacity, and secure, and that is unique to fifth generation. That allows the use of data link for all scenarios.

•(1615)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you for that.

Mr. Chairman, we talk about getting out and doing a competition and all that kind of stuff, with the very high probability that we would wind up with the F-35 in any event.

Could we get the same kind of deal and the same kind of capability in our F-35s if we acquired them through an outside competition?

Col Dave Burt: Thank you for the question.

As was described to this committee by Mr. Ross last week, it's understood that if we went to a competition and we chose to incorporate into that competition the need for industrial and regional benefits, the MOU explicitly tells us that we would not be able to do that through the MOU; therefore, we would have to leave the MOU.

We've done some analysis recently. While the details are at a highly classified level, I can say that owing to the nature of our participation in the program, participation has its privileges across a range of different things: industrial benefits, the cost of the capabilities that we are procuring, and operational capability. What has become clear to us is that if we were to buy this aircraft through any means other than the MOU, there is some chance—and it is quite a reasonable assumption—that the capability we would be procuring would not be as good as the capability we would procure through the MOU.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Obviously we've come to that conclusion in Canada. A whole range of other countries that have people with qualifications similar to yours, military and civilian, have all come to the same conclusion. Should we take that as a trend?

Obviously you're not a stupid person. These people aren't stupid people. Their countries want the best equipment for their men and women, just as we do. Is there a trend here? Is this maybe the answer?

Col Dave Burt: Mr. Chairman, among all nine partners in the JSF program there is absolute unanimity that the capability provided by fifth-generation F-35s is exactly what is needed for the future.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will give the floor to Mr. Wilfert.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, General and Colonel.

General, I just want to acknowledge the great work the Canadian Air Force does both at home and abroad, and the personnel involved, and to thank you and members of your team for that.

Through you, Mr. Chairman, the Auditor General's report suggested there were huge gaps in oversight during the entire Chinook procurement process. What steps have been taken to ensure these gaps in oversight don't occur in the F-35 procurement process?

Before you answer that, Mr. Chairman, maybe I have a question for you. I would like to see the Department of National Defence undertake to provide regular updates to this committee, particularly with regard to the issue of the oversight of costs and the oversight mechanisms being used in the purchase so that we won't be in the same situation we were before.

My second question for General Deschamps is about the maintenance costs of the F-35, which we have heard will be about \$7 billion. When we had Alan Williams here, he reminded us that we really don't know what those costs will be, as we really don't know that far in advance. Could you, General or Colonel, indicate what is the range of estimates for the in-service support costs? How confident are you that those in-service support costs won't exceed the upper end of the range? What would happen if in fact they do?

I have a couple of other questions if I get those answered.

•(1620)

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: Your first question, I believe, is a request to have the department provide regular updates. That's probably something the deputy minister or ADM Materiel would have to address, because it's not within my domain to provide that kind of information on procurement.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: That kind of information, presumably, would be available and we could—

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: Within the department, the different levels of review have that information. What is releasable would have to be determined by the department itself, given, again, that a lot of the information does dwell in the classified domain, depending on what parts of the program are being scrutinized.

As to the second part of your question, I believe it was about sustainment costs and predictability. I'll let Colonel Burt address that, because he's obviously given it some serious thought. But I think it's safe to assume, if you look just at past experience, that small fleets of single types of aircraft over time cost more money. That's a given. We've experienced that in all our small fleets.

Clearly, even though the actual numbers are still to be negotiated with our partners and industry to get the best deal, we're very confident that the deal we'll get will be better than any deal we would get for a small fleet of unique airplanes. Past experience dictates that would be the case.

That being said, I'll turn it over to Colonel Burt to give you the range of estimates we've looked at, and he can address how we've come to those conclusions.

Col Dave Burt: It is true that we are continuing to work with the other JSF partners to develop the sustainment process. There's been a series of sustainment war games ongoing through these months to that end, and it's anticipated that over these months we will get a clearer understanding of the nature of the collective sustainment process.

However, we do have initial estimates, and from those initial estimates it appears that the cost of sustainment of an F-35 for Canada would be approximately the same as what we're paying currently for our fighter capability.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: The AG's report talked about poorly documented deviations from National Defence's project approval guide during the Chinook procurement process. Have there been any similar deviations so far with the F-35 procurement process?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: Again, I think Colonel Burt has mentioned the fact that we're now establishing the internal process to make sure that the F-35 procurement process does remain consistent with government accountability rules and departmental rules. But because it is somewhat of a different process, with an external body that we participate in and that also has jurisdiction, if you will, in some of that decision-making, we need to connect those two together so there's harmony between what is done in National Defence and what's taken down to the partnership in Washington.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I presume then that if there are deviations, they would be properly recorded, and obviously....

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: The point being that there are no deviations yet, because we haven't established a process, which is what Colonel Burt is currently working on.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: And you expect that to be seamless with our allies?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: That's correct, sir.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Again, Mr. Chair, I'll come back later to the issue of updates. Maybe when we have the deputy minister before us we could look at some regularized process.

Thank you.

The Chair: Great. Thank you.

We'll give the floor to Mr. Braid.

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both of our witnesses for being here this afternoon.

Perhaps I could start with a question for you, General Deschamps. You talked in your presentation about the requirements that have been identified, which dictate the fighter jet that we need. Are there any fourth-generation fighter jets that would meet our identified requirements?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: With regard to the analysis we looked at, again, I go back to the Canada First defence strategy, which basically lays out the three defence missions: the defence of Canada and North America, and of course our relevant contribution to international peace and security. As you break those down, what do we need practically and tactically? What types of missions will we be called upon to do, if that's the strategic national military mission? As you break those down, this is where we find those tactical risks that we need to identify. How do we address them?

Clearly, when we go abroad into unstable environments where there are multiple actors, either state or non-state, and a proliferation of technologies, which can be very threatening to air operations, (a) you need to be able to determine what those threats are, through intelligence, surveillance, or reconnaissance, and (b) if you're required to take action, you have to be effective in a very complex and dangerous environment.

An analysis of all those potential tasks brings out the high-level requirements and the mandatory requirements. As we looked at all those different tasks we have to do both at home and abroad, only the fifth-generation aircraft was able to meet the whole spectrum of requirements. There are lots of great airplanes. The problem is, as we look at that horizon of the next 30 to 40 years, the fifth-generation piece will play a significant role in ensuring that we remain relevant and able to do what government will want us to do. That's why I think our analysis has been done thoroughly and with our partners, who also don't spend money lightly. They see the fifth-generation aircraft as the long-term solution to being able to adapt to that future risk.

• (1625)

Mr. Peter Braid: Thank you.

With respect to delivery, in your presentation you laid out in very clear terms that—and we've heard this from many experts who've appeared before us—the CF-18s take us to 2018, or 2020 at the very most. We need to start buying planes in 2016, and the procurement process, as you stated, needs to begin almost tomorrow. Hypothetically, if the process for acquiring our next fighter jet is either delayed or cancelled and we don't have fighter jets after 2020 for whatever period of time, what would that mean to our air force, to our air force capabilities, and to the defence of Canada?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: I think it's fair to say that the upgrades we've done to the CF-18 are tremendous, and the airplane, right now, is very relevant and capable of doing our business. The sad truth, though, is that the airplanes are aging. They're great airplanes, but they're going to reach the end of their service life. Airplanes are built around a maximum amount of time they can fly given the airframe and the structure fatigue, which will become an issue. We've replaced a lot of components on the airplane, but there are some very key components that will not be replaced without a huge reinvestment program, which would see us spend a lot of money to try to renew 40-year-old airplanes. So this is where there's a cost curve that we fall behind now if we decide to delay the program. We will lose capabilities as we approach the end of the decade and we have to start parking airplanes because they're no longer safe to fly. Then we're going to start having less capability for our mission internationally and, certainly at some point, at home.

That's the risk factor we have to keep in mind as we look at timeliness. There is a very firm definite ending to airplanes. That's the way airworthiness works. We have to be cognizant that it can't be stretched without massive reinvestment. I'm not even sure it's technically possible, in many respects, to extend the life of the older CF-18s once we've done what we've already done.

That's the risk we run if we delay the program too much. We will run into a capability gap towards the end of this decade.

Mr. Peter Braid: I have a final, important question.

In 10 or 15 years, if major powers in the world, both allies and non-allies of Canada, have a fifth-generation fighter and we don't, what will that mean?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: I think it will mean we will be limited in our usefulness in our coalition with our partners.

Again, as Colonel Burt has explained, those other platforms can operate seamlessly. We would be required to find the ways and means to try to integrate into these more advanced systems with a less capable system. Therefore, we would run greater risk...and potentially be a bit of a hindrance sometimes, depending on the scenarios. Or we would have to be used in a very limited fashion to avoid increasing risk to our partners.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Bachand, you have five minutes.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to come back to the comments made earlier by Lieutenant-General Deschamps.

I consulted my team, Lieutenant-General. And I never said that I didn't have confidence in you. What is important to me is to do my job as MP as effectively as possible. I want to make sure that taxpayers are getting fair value for their dollars and that they have the best aircraft. That is the issue. You said that, if I was given the job, I wouldn't know what to do. That's probably true. I probably wouldn't have access to National Defence computers. Furthermore, I certainly don't have the knowledge of a general with 25 or 30 years' experience.

However, General, you need to understand that we have a specific role. In this case, we need to ensure that citizens and taxpayers get fair value for their money and get the best planes. That is why I will keep at it at the risk of making you uncomfortable.

Colonel Burt, you said earlier that there are only a few people in the world with access to this level of classification. I would like to know whether you, Colonel, or you, Lieutenant-General, have that access.

• (1630)

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: People at National Defence, including myself, have access to a high level of classification.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Were we to propose that you appear before the committee again in camera, without journalists or the public present, would that be acceptable, in your way of thinking?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: I do not set the program security requirements. Unfortunately, we must respect the agreement that was reached between the nine partners. We must respect the program security standards. The program is extremely sensitive, Mr. Bachand. This technology does not exist anywhere else in the world.

We must respect what has been established as the international standard by the partners. This standard is very rigorously enforced by the United States. Otherwise, the partners would lose confidence and would no longer want to work with us. My goal is not to refuse to provide you with more details, but, in order for us to move forward as a coalition, we must respect the terms of the agreement we have reached with our nine partners.

Mr. Claude Bachand: The MPs of the eight other nations subject to the protocol of understanding are then probably in the same situation we are.

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: I cannot say, Mr. Bachand. Within the American administration, some committees have access to higher levels of authorization and can obtain more detailed information. I cannot tell you what the situation in other countries is. All I can tell you is that we must respect the program security standards.

There is one thing that I find somewhat troubling, and perhaps that is why I reacted a little strongly. Given the media and exchanges that have taken place in Ottawa, there is a rumour that the Canadian Forces, for one reason or another, are trying to spend more money and purchase less. This greatly troubles me. First, it makes us look like we are incompetent, and second, I wonder why I would want to reduce our capacity. That is why I do not find the conversation logical.

You need to accept that the Canadian Forces do not have a lot of funds with which to carry out all our programs. So, we try to get the most with the funds we have. You can rest assured of that, Mr. Bachand.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Okay. I want to say again that this is not about a lack of confidence. I am simply trying to do my job as an MP as best I can. Sometimes, it is a bit frustrating for us to run up against classifications. Furthermore, I have already experienced this situation with regard to the Afghan detainees. Nevertheless, I think that we are in agreement now.

Mr. Burt, you mentioned the chart earlier. I congratulate you for having it in hand when Mr. Hawn asked his question. I think he was reassured. It was lucky that you brought the chart. Can we get it? Yes.

Are we not changing the doctrine and the mission of the Canadian air force by further developing air-to-ground? This stealth fighter will allow much more significant surgical strikes. If a CF-18 heads towards a target and is seen coming, it is possible to take the necessary defensive measures to avoid being attacked. Can you confirm for me that missions will change and, as a result, you will be able to make more surgical and, consequently, perhaps more powerful strikes.

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: Mr. Chair, I can answer that question.

Your reading is accurate. It is exactly as you said. The aircraft will enable us to accept highly difficult and highly dangerous missions and ensure maximum survivability and success. If we go on a mission, but we are not successful, we are wasting our time. In addition, we have to bring our people and our equipment back.

With current technology, considerable lateral support would be required to attack a well-defended target. Some aircraft block electromagnetic waves, and others are equipped with cruise missiles to try and eliminate the enemy.

This aircraft does not require all of that support. It is capable of operating more independently, which means that we have greater flexibility during missions. That is the advantage.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Bachand.

Mr. Boughen, you have the floor.

[English]

You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, gentlemen. It's good of you to spend some time with us. We appreciate your information and your knowledge on the F-35.

General, you talked about a number of aircraft for Canada at 65. That seems to be the critical mass for aircraft. Could you elaborate a little bit on that for us?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: How did we arrive at 65? Well, we had to do a bit of analysis of what our missions are, again both at home and abroad, what are our commitments to our NATO partnerships, and then try to determine, given the new technology involved in the F-35, what would be a suitable and sustainable number of aircraft that would help us meet the domestic roles and the international roles.

We're going to go from 80 airplanes—or actually 78, because we've lost a couple of F-18s in the last few years—to 65 aircraft. So how do we get the same amount of fire power, if you will, with fewer airplanes? The answer is the F-35, because of the changes in the way maintenance is done and the reliability of the systems, is far more available than our current F-18s, which tend to have an availability rating in the 50% to 60% range, whereas these new airplanes will be at the 80%-plus range of availability.

The way it works for us is generating hours to fly. The number of airplanes tells you how much flying you can do and therefore how many people you can maintain and train and how many deployments you can do. With 65 F-35s we can do an equivalent amount of flying that we currently do with 80 CF-18s.

So that's how we got to 65.

There are physically fewer airplanes, so there are limits, at some point, that you reach if you have to geographically disperse and do international deployment. Those would have to be managed, because at some point you do reach the limit of geography and number of platforms. But 65 lets us meet all our defence needs at this time. As I said previously, should the future defence needs change, we have the option of going back and increasing that fleet, should that be the decision of the government at the time.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Thank you.

I have just one other question. Do I have a couple of minutes? Thanks, Chair.

Perhaps you could explain some of the difficulties Canada experienced in Bosnia with the CF-18s. And will flying that same platform as NATO partners prevent these issues from happening in the future because our platforms will be the F-35?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: I think I'll let Colonel Burt answer that, since he was there.

Col Dave Burt: Thank you for the question.

Indeed we did have a fairly significant challenge in the Kosovo campaign in that we had a type of radio that was not interoperable with the radios that were available from the other coalition partners. We lacked the Have Quick II capability. Unfortunately, whenever our aircraft were in the coalition package, we could not use that capability. What that capability does is it's a frequency agile radio and it improves the security of the transmissions. While it did not have any significant impact on the operations, it certainly had a significant impact on us.

At the time, I was the project director of CF-18 modernization, and I made a commitment to myself and to all the fighter pilots who followed me that if I had any power in this process, I would have them fully interoperable and operationally relevant for their lifetime. That has been a goal of our process, and it is certainly one of the statements in the objective for the next-generation fighter capability project.

Mr. Ray Boughen: Thank you, Colonel.

Thanks, Chair.

The Chair: You still have a minute left.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Through you, Mr. Chair, to Colonel Burt, there seems to be a misunderstanding that somehow we're changing the mission, we're changing the roles. The CF-18 was a multi-role, air-to-air and air-to-ground, very complex airplane for its day. The F-35 is a very complex, multi-role, air-to-air and air-to-ground aircraft.

So just to confirm, it's not that we're changing the missions and the roles; we're just doing it against a threat that is going to be much more sophisticated over the next 30 to 40 years. It's going to be the same type of mission, just in a much higher threat environment, where the capabilities of a fifth-generation aircraft like the F-35 will allow us to continue to do those jobs that we did with the CF-18, but in fact do them better and do them in a more survivable fashion than we would be able to do with a CF-18.

Col Dave Burt: Mr. Chair, that's absolutely correct.

The challenge we have is that while our roles will continue in both air-to-air and air-to-ground, the adversary and the capabilities of the adversary continue to evolve. What we need to do is put ourselves in a situation where we can evolve our capability to stay ahead of the adversary, and what we have determined is that only the F-35 gives us that opportunity to stay ahead, such that our men and women who fly these aircraft will survive the mission, perform the mission exactly correctly, and be able to conduct another mission the next day.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dryden, you have the floor.

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you, and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

I have two very different questions. The first one has to do with the Auditor General's report, and as disturbing as cost overruns are—unless I understand what her report says incorrectly—I think what she is saying is that in terms of the Chinook, there is a certain basic model of the Chinook, a certain cost of that basic model, and this was the cost that was made known publicly and also to Parliament. The report says that at the same time it was also known that this is not what we were going to be purchasing. We were going to be wanting upgrades to the Chinook, not just the basic model, and Defence officials knew that the cost of those upgrades was going to be increased, so the cost was going to be that much more, even though the cost that was made known to the public was less.

How could that be? Why should we feel more comfortable this time?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: Thank you for the question.

The question might be better directed to the procurement side of the department. What I can tell you, though, is that part of the challenge in expressing how this works is that procurement is a complicated business. There is preliminary project approval, which is approval from government to move ahead and expend some funds to do project definitions, to say, yes, we are going to procure something that looks like this, and go and do some detailed analysis and come back for final project approval.

Where I think a fair amount of confusion has arisen is between that initial phase with the Chinook, which was that preliminary

project approval, to the final project approval, where the definition work was done—from the first approval to the fact that when we got to the last piece of approval for the department, we had then a fuller understanding of the mission sets and the requirements for Canada, and therefore some additional requirements were needed for the airplane to be fully usable in our domestic geographical area.

Hon. Ken Dryden: Sir, I understand that, but is this also not the point at which then what is made public is that these changes are necessary and the cost is going to be that much greater?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: I can't tell you, sir, when that process occurs. Normally, for us, we go to Treasury Board when we do these initials and finals, and all those issues are tabled with Treasury Board.

Hon. Ken Dryden: I'm assuming that in the process of your determination on the F-35 you know the nature of the challenges in the world. You know what other countries are doing; you try to anticipate the future as best you can. And it's your job, from an air perspective, to try to deliver to those best-anticipated needs. That's your job, and to make that known to National Defence.

I assume it's up to National Defence then to decide that it's their job to try to work on the safety and security of Canada and on the safety, security, and effectiveness of our military, and to take that into consideration knowing that choices have to be made. Money goes to the air force, or to the navy, or to the army, or it goes to certain other ways in which one works on the security and safety of the country.

Is that the process you went through? Knowing that you're not determining it—and even National Defence is not determining it, but Foreign Affairs would be determining what they would imagine—how would we, in the position that we're in, determine the best direction in which to go on the purchase of an F-35 if it was not in the context of all the rest that I'm speaking about?

• (1645)

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: You bring up a very good point. Within the department there's always consensus before we go to any major procurement program. So this is not something the air force runs up to the minister's office with and gives our advice, saying we'd like him to procure this. I have to get my colleagues—the army, navy, and special forces, the entire department—to support the program as to what is needed to meet defence needs. So we have to go through a very robust internal vetting process, because, as you mentioned, money is tight for all these programs, and therefore great scrutiny is applied outside the air force to make sure this is truly what the department needs to look at and needs to program into procurement.

So before it gets to the minister or to government for advice, it has been thoroughly scrutinized within the department by CF colleagues and the department, the non-military side. That's why we sit around these project boards, and all these programs have to go through that filter at several levels—joint, and then the project management board—before it even gets close to government advice. So internally there's a very robust screening process to make sure programs that make it to advice to government have been looked at very thoroughly.

I think your question is a bit beyond the internal mechanisms of Defence. It probably speaks more to how we get to policy, because that's what we're reacting to. It goes back to the Canada First defence strategy, which announces our international policy. Therefore, we will be able to participate nationally as a coalition or within other alliances to deliver international peace and stability.

This is really the debate I think you're referring to. How do we shape national policies? That's very much in the political domain, and that's a process I believe that has been debated or talked about for a long time, and I certainly can't answer it. But I would believe that's the area that nationally should be well aired, so when we go to these procurements, there's at least an agreement that fighters are required. If fighters are not seen as required, anything we buy seems too much. We have to get the principles of understanding in the first instance. I think that's the important piece, and afterwards it's a lot easier to have consensus on what equipment best fits that need.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

I now give the floor to Mr. Payne.

[English]

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, welcome. I'd like to ask my questions through the chair to you, and certainly the option is open to whoever wants to respond to the question.

Previously you talked, General Deschamps, about the options that Canada would have, particularly when we know that Russia and China are probably building fifth-generation aircraft. If this fighter F-35 program is cancelled, where does that leave Canada in terms of being able to meet these other international crises, when we know other countries are probably selling those aircraft to other countries?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: The question goes back to my statement about the future environment being more dangerous because of the proliferation of technology and potentially non-state actors having access to very high technology. So for us it goes back to the point that if we can't evolve our capabilities into a more complex and less predictable domain, we will be subject to limitations as we face international crises or are required to participate in peace and stability operations as part of our international commitments. That would certainly leave us at a disadvantage in being able to do that international mission.

Mr. LaVar Payne: From what I understand, that means you would have great difficulty working with our allies and NATO and so on.

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: As the colonel mentioned with the example of Kosovo, we would become the partner that would have to be given special allowances given the limitation of their platform. That means either we would not be able to go into the same level of mission integration or potentially that would put significant enough limitation on our participation to make it irrelevant. So this is the challenge as we try to look at the future. If we cannot maintain relevancy in these complex scenarios, our usefulness will be limited.

• (1650)

Mr. LaVar Payne: The F-35 with stealth capabilities, to me, sounds very much like having a submarine in the ocean with such capabilities that people don't know where that particular submarine is. Is that a good analogy?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: In fact, that's exactly the analogy I used a few months back to try to express how this is different from other airplanes. It's basically the game changer that submarines were to naval surface warfare. Why? Because submarines were almost undetectable and therefore always had first strike. They could always get the first blow in.

What happened afterwards was sometimes more of an even fight, especially with technology later on. But even to this day, submarines remain the most dangerous threat in the ocean because of their stealthiness. They're hard to detect, almost impossible in certain conditions, and they always have first-strike option.

That's what stealth does; it's that same equivalent to submarine warfare. By and large, you will always have that first option of not being detected and therefore being able to take first action, which is usually a determinant to winning.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Okay.

We've talked a bit about the stealth. That certainly means we can do more with less aircraft and participate with our allies.

There has been some talk about the interoperability. I'd like you to clarify that again for me. Colonel Burt was talking about the data transfer, and I'd like more clarification on that.

Col Dave Burt: The data transfer capabilities available in the fifth-generation F-35 are unique to the F-35. The F-35 is interoperable with fourth-generation capabilities, understanding the limitations of that lesser interoperability. But in order to remain fully interoperable and operationally relevant with our key allies for the mid and far future, we must have the types of technologies that are available only through the fifth-generation F-35.

The Chair: That's it.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: I will give the floor to Mrs. Gallant for five minutes.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Would you please remind me of the year that our former Chinook helicopters were sold to the Netherlands?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: If memory serves, I believe it was in 1993 or 1994 that the airplanes were sold off.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Okay. So it's as a consequence of selling those off that we even got into the position of needing to buy new ones when our soldiers were on the ground in Afghanistan.

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: At the time I believe the decision was made that the anticipated roles for the military did not require the continued use of that platform. Those were decisions that were made in the nineties.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Okay. A comparison of the Chinook purchase to that of the F-35 has been made a number of times today. Quite apart from the fact that our soldiers were dying after having been sent on a mission to Afghanistan without proper equipment and without parliamentary approval, in the case of the F-35, we do now, and we have had over the last decade, the luxury of time in planning for the F-18 replacement.

But if the purchase is delayed we will be under the gun again, just like we were in acquiring the Chinooks. So I'm truly inspired by the new-found fiscal responsibility that the opposition wants to find and exercise in this purchase.

Can you explain to us, with respect to the JSF video and high resolution, whether they can take the high-resolution photos to assist in surveillance operations on Canadians, such as fishing, human smuggling, and drug smuggling?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: The F-35 platform has very credible and powerful sensors, in the conventional sense of radar and so on, but it also has passive systems and electrical optical sensors such as you just mentioned. Combined with stealth, it certainly opens up more capability and options for government when it comes to building situational awareness, whether that's off our coastal waters or over foreign countries, where we are required to understand what's going on before we can make decisions or take action.

•(1655)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Do you feel that 65 F-35 aircraft are sufficient for our projected needs at this time?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: The 65 aircraft will meet our defence needs as expected currently.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: I just had confirmed that the Netherlands took delivery of our Chinook choppers in 1996.

I will always remember being on the tarmac in Afghanistan in 2002 and 2008 and seeing the Chinook helicopter with a faded-out portrayal of our flag on the tail. Again, in the past we were in a situation because of short-sightedness, the same sort of short-sightedness we are trying to avoid in thinking through this purchase.

Pilots and technicians will have to be trained on this platform. Is the air force ready to undertake this, and how much effort will it entail?

Col Dave Burt: We are working through the partnership process in different committees to understand clearly how we will do our pilot training and our technician training. We understand the timelines for bringing the aircraft to Canada and starting our

operations, and we are confident that we will get the training completed in time to have the people in place to operate the aircraft safely and effectively.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Will this mean more jobs at the air bases—for example, Bagotville—or will it be simply a replacement of skills on the part of the people who currently service F-18s?

Col Dave Burt: We expect that the number of people who will be involved in JSF operations will be approximately the same as what we have in our fighter operations now. Some of the types of jobs will change, but we expect the total number to remain approximately the same.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Some suggest that the F-35 is just too much for Canada's needs. Could we accomplish the same thing with a less advanced aircraft or a more basic variant of the F-35?

Col Dave Burt: The answer is no, absolutely not. Our analysis has shown absolutely clearly that measured against the Canadian Forces requirements, the best capability and the longest life at the least cost are available only through the F-35.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. LeBlanc, you have the floor. I believe you will be sharing your time.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have quite a quick question, and I believe that Mr. Wilfert wants to continue after that.

I would like to continue with the same kind of questions that Colonel Burt has been asked. In fact, he appears very convinced that this is the only aircraft that can meet the requirements as determined. In mid-September, the general said that there had been rigorous examination of long-term requirements. I accept all of that.

If you say that this is the only aircraft that can meet these rigorous requirements, you undoubtedly assessed other aircraft in detail before reaching that conclusion. You did not reach that decision without having compared the aircraft to other ones available. You may tell me that it is the only one you are aware of, the only one which could meet the criteria, and you may be right. However, you will agree with me that you undoubtedly took a detailed look at other aircraft.

My question is very specific. If you do not have this information, could you provide it to us later? How many times did you and your staff visit Lockheed Martin in 2009 and 2010? How many times did you visit Boeing or Eurofighter in Europe? Did you ask the American government for the detailed specifications for the Super Hornet being proposed by Boeing? Did you consider the specific information that only the American government could have transferred to your group?

[English]

Col Dave Burt: Over the years we have looked at a range of different options. Specifically, after the Canada First defence strategy was announced in 2006, the teams were established: the directorate of air requirements team to mature and advance the operational requirements, and the next-generation fighter capability office—my team—to analyze the options against those requirements. We've played our separate roles.

In that process we visited the range of manufacturers and the countries and government agencies involved in those countries for all of the options that we needed to study. We used that analysis, some of it at a classified level and some of it not at a classified level. We received cost information and capability information on a government-to-government basis. From that, we did our analyses. We were very conclusive in those analyses that only the F-35 met the mandatory requirements approved by the Department of National Defence.

• (1700)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Mr. Chairman, through you to the general or the colonel, not being a pilot, obviously, I want to ask you some questions that I'm sure you can respond to.

I'm quoting from an article from an individual who has been around the U.S. Congress for 30 years, Winslow Wheeler, who is the director of the Straus Military Reform Project of the Center for Defense Information, with regard to the stealth capabilities. If you would, can you respond to these comments? He says:

...that new “high tech” feature and the long range radar have imposed design penalties that compromised the aircraft with not just high cost but also weight, drag, complexity, and vulnerabilities. The few times this technology has been tried in real air combat in the past decade, it has been successful less than half the time, and that has been against incompetent and/or primitively equipped pilots from Iraq and Serbia.

The other comment I'd like to put on the table, Mr. Chairman, is “The F-35 is, in fact, considerably less manoeuvrable than the appallingly vulnerable F-105”.

Remember the F-105s used to be called the “lead sleds”, which they used, of course, as a fighter, which proved rather defenceless against MiGs over North Vietnam.

Can you respond to those two comments? He makes some others, but I'm putting them on the table because I want to understand this apparent discrepancy between what I've been told and what I've read in this particular report.

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: You know, people are free to speculate, and everyone is entitled to their opinions. Comparing an F-105, which is a “lead sled”, to the F-35 is somewhat facetious. The F-105 would take several counties to turn around, while the F-35 is as good in a manoeuvrability range as the current F-18s and F-16s. So it's a specious argument.

Now, when you have stealth, there is compromise. You do have to compromise. You're not going to have the fastest airplane in the world or the one that can stand on its tail the longest, because to aerodynamically create stealth, you have to give something up. But it doesn't have to be the fastest airplane in the world or the absolute most manoeuvrable. That would be the F-22.

But what it does is multi-role. I can cover the air-to-air mission as well as anything out there, the point being it doesn't have to get into those close-in dogfights because that's the whole point of stealth. You deal with the adversary at long range, and they don't even know they've been taken out. But if it gets into survival and you have to fight the fight, it's still as good as anything that's out there right now. It's not the very most manoeuvrable airplane. That's the F-22. But that airplane is designed strictly for air superiority. This one is doing multi-role. That's the compromise piece that always has to be considered.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Thank you for that, General.

A quick question: he goes on to say that only 17% of the aircraft's characteristics will actually be validated by flight testing before the Americans buy 500 of these F-35s, and that it will be the pilots who will discover the glitches when they're up in the air, obviously, training or in combat. Could you respond to that 17% issue, Colonel, through you, Mr. Chairman?

Col Dave Burt: It's called concurrency, and what is happening in this program, because of the validity of the modelling initially and the initial testing that showed the validity of the modelling...there is a rationale for moving ahead and buying production aircraft at the same time that the test process is going on. This is very closely watched by the JSF program office and the program executive officer. On a daily basis he gets reports on the nature of the success of this process.

Because he is watching this so closely, that gives me great confidence that small errors would be found early and corrected before they become problems. While this is unprecedented, the nature of the modelling, the degree of computer design, and the success of the early testing give us great confidence that this process will succeed.

• (1705)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Bachand, you have the floor.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Gentlemen, Canadian Press has just put out a story. It deals with a study obtained under access to information entitled:

[English]

“Internal DND audit uncovers more red flags in other aircraft purchases.”

[Translation]

It refers to search and rescue aircraft.

According to the report, the Chief of Review Services conducted an internal audit at the Department of National Defence. He allegedly discovered a lack of oversight and that follow-up on risk assessments was not sufficiently documented.

He added that:

[English]

The Forces' own internal auditor warns it was on the same shaky ground as the helicopters. Within each phase of DND risk management methodology, certain risk management practices were not in place in the project office.

[Translation]

That concerns me. The Auditor General just said that about the helicopters. Now we are talking about your own internal audit. Your

[English]

chief of review services

[Translation]

says that it is on the same ground as the search and rescue helicopters. I need some reassurance about the F-35 project.

What is the problem at the department? Is the program manager changing too often? Colonel Burt is the program manager and appears to have held the position for some time. That is already reassuring. Explain to us why there are not better safeguards especially for projects of this scope. We are talking about billions of dollars. This afternoon, we learned that the program

[English]

search and rescue, fixed wing search and rescue,

[Translation]

is in a situation similar to that of the helicopters. We are talking about a \$16 billion project here. You understand that, as those who protect taxpayers, we need to be reassured. What is your opinion of what your chief of

[English]

review service

[Translation]

disclosed this afternoon? Give us some reassurances about the F-35 program.

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: Mr. Bachand, clearly, I have not read the article. Therefore I will not comment on allegations made by the press.

I can assure you that we called upon our most experienced and best staff for the F-35 file. We have people who are highly competent in aviation matters and in procurement. We are going to great lengths to ensure that the program will start out on the right foot and operate likewise.

Does that mean that the department is perfect and that we never make mistakes? As I have already said, auditors are responsible for looking, for forcing us to ask ourselves questions, because we can always improve. We are always open to improvement. I have no idea about what you just mentioned. As regards the

[English]

fixed wing search and rescue,

[Translation]

For several years now, we have been working as a team to try and move the project forward and to ensure that everyone was heard. So

I do not understand why we are being accused of not having been open and transparent. How many years have we been talking about

[English]

fixed wing search and rescue?

[Translation]

We are doing our outmost to ensure that everyone was heard and our recommendations are as inclusive as possible. That is the assurance I can give.

Mr. Claude Bachand: General, I have no doubt about the transparency. I trust you.

But do you have the resources you need to look at the program in its entirety? If developments occur, can you react immediately? Can you assure us that the project manager will not change every two or three years? This is a very large-scale and long-term project. I still believe that there are some problems. You said so yourself. Since we are studying the F-35s today, I am asking you for that assurance. Do you have the teams that you need to

[English]

monitoring the risk?

[Translation]

Are you in a position to do that? Can people identify cost overruns and remedy the situation immediately? With a \$16 billion project, that can easily turn into additional billions of dollars. We saw the price for the helicopters almost double. At the end of the day, there must not be a \$32 billion overrun.

• (1710)

The Chair: Be brief.

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I can assure you of one thing. The project is underway, we have begun training the teams that will look after the materiel aspect. Colonel Burt will be one of the team leaders. I am hopeful that we have started off on the right foot. We will have to make sure that we have enough staff in the various departmental services to ensure that the program continues to go well and is a complete success. We are in the starting blocks and ready to go. We must establish procedures and ensure that they are solid and consistent with Treasury Board rules and accountability standards. We are building the team.

It is clear to us that we must have enough experience and staff to carry out the project.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Harris.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

When Mr. Dan Ross was here, he told us that within DND you have a very rigorous system of management review of decisions, and there are two or three review boards. He told us in no uncertain terms that these were significant challenges to any decisions that were being made, that they gave everybody a hard time, and that it was a real test of decision-making and a value for—we should have some confidence, I guess, that the decision-making wasn't happening on a less than rigorous basis.

Then we find that, according to the Auditor General, those management review boards were bypassed or ignored in the case of the Chinook purchase, and the chief of review services now says that in terms of the activity to date on the search and rescue project, they weren't followed either. You told us today, and you've made reference to it—I don't want to misquote you—that there has been or there will be a form of this with respect to the F-35. But why aren't these systems being used? And what confidence can we have, frankly, that there is going to be a value with respect to these decisions that have been made with respect to the F-35 to date and in the future?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: I won't speak for the department, because that's not my purview. I can only speak to what the air force does. I can tell you, working with our colleagues, the ADM Materiel folks work very hard at making sure Canada gets the best procurement process possible.

The Auditor General points to internal processes that should be improved. That's what it is: internal processes. Could we do things better? We have to be careful when we talk about Chinooks and F-35s. They're both procurement programs, absolutely. They're not the same programs. The complexities are different. Therefore, you can't use always a cookie-cutter approach to all these programs. The rules have to be measured and adapted depending on the challenge of each program.

That's what the Auditor General reflects on, the fact that some of these programs, based on your own current internal rule set, may have deviated. Was there a good reason? And so on and so forth. That's what the department looked at and acknowledged the areas that we would improve. But it's an internal process.

The fact is that great scrutiny is applied to all these programs, given the tense resource atmosphere, where we have to make sure everybody gets what they need. Whether or not a meeting was missed or some other internal process wasn't quite followed to a T doesn't detract from the fact that everybody who gets involved in these programs understands the imperative to be accountable and to get the best bang for the buck for Canada. That I can give you confidence on. That's always the optic. That's always the focus of the staff. Whether or not perfection is what we achieve in the process, I'll leave that to others to debate.

Mr. Jack Harris: That's your answer. Thank you.

Colonel Burt, in response to Mr. Bachand's question, I believe, you told us that there were mandatory requirements approved by the department in 2006, was it? There was that examination—it wasn't Mr. Bachand, it was an earlier question—that the other airplanes were tested against? What would those mandatory requirements be? Would that be a statement of requirements, as we understand it, in procurement, or is that something else?

●(1715)

Col Dave Burt: Thank you for the opportunity to clarify my statement. What I said was that in reaction to the Canada First defence strategy, which provided us strategic guidance in 2006, the process was set up, and through the early part of 2010 the statement of operational requirements, including the mandatory requirements, was finalized and approved. It was against those mandatory requirements that we measured all of the options. We found that, measured against those requirements and using the information we had received on a government-to-government basis, the F-35 procured through the JSF program provided the best capability, the longest life, at the least cost.

Mr. Jack Harris: When was that statement of requirements finalized?

Col Dave Burt: It was finalized in the spring of 2010.

Mr. Jack Harris: Gentlemen, we got rid of—

The Chair: A short question.

Mr. Jack Harris: Okay. I'm just trying to keep it focused.

You've talked a lot about what kinds of things the planes might be used for. Is there a paper or a doctrine or a document you could make available to the committee that sets out the kinds of missions you would expect an airplane of this nature to be engaged in, something that says here are the threats we see, or here are the operations we see Canada participating in for which we decide we need equipment? It would be a sort of strategic thing, I suppose.

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: I suppose the document that does have a certain amount of that information would be the Canada First defence strategy. It does talk about the strategic level need for these kinds of technologies.

The air force doctrine manuals—we're revising our own internal documentation—is our view of the world and how the air force needs to operate within it. We have doctrine on fighter operations and future needs that is embedded in our own air force internal thinking process, if you will.

Those would be informative, but they don't drive the statement of requirements; the requirements are based on very specific tasks. It explains how air power should be employed, how it's integrated, and how it's leveraged.

The theology of air power is found in our air doctrine, which is web-based. We can certainly give you the web address, should you be interested.

Mr. Jack Harris: That's public.

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: It is available to the public, yes, sir.

Mr. Jack Harris: But that's not a strategic analysis in terms of what Canada would want to do.

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: It's not a classified intelligence analysis, no. It's our doctrinal view of how air power needs to evolve in the future.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Thank you very much.

I will give the floor to Mr. Hawn for five minutes.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Through you to Colonel Burt, we've obviously talked a lot about stealth capability, the F-35, and fifth generation. There have been people suggesting that older airplanes are just as good, or whatever.

Can you talk about the difference in the stealth capability between the F-35 and the Super Hornet, which is obviously the airplane that is most on people's minds?

Col Dave Burt: Mr. Chairman, with your approval, I will use another couple of slides that I will be able to leave with you.

Mr. Claude Bachand: That's convenient.

An hon. member: He comes prepared.

Col Dave Burt: There's been a lot of discussion about the nature of the differences between the F-35 and other options we were considering. We use slides in a briefing, obviously, and I've brought hard copies to show the nature of the difference.

These aircraft are all in their combat-ready state, and there's clearly a difference between the one on the right and the ones on the left. That is what comprises stealth. People often ask how you tell whether an aircraft is stealthy. Well, when you first look at it, you can see when it is in its combat-ready state.

What is good about the F-35 is that after you advance beyond the high threat environment where stealth is no longer required, you can take more ordnance on the outside—external—and you start to look similar to the other aircraft. But that's in an environment where you don't need to have the stealth capabilities. This type of flexibility gives the Government of Canada a range of options that does not exist with any other option.

• (1720)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: And speaking of slides, I've seen these slides before. They're well illustrated.

I'm obviously familiar with the program, and these are the kinds of questions I would expect Colonel Burt to be able to answer.

I can't remember, so I won't state the number, but I recall seeing a slide where it had a relative range, a detection kill range between an F-18 and an F-35. The difference was substantial. I don't want to say the number in case it's classified, but can you give us an indication of the distance...how far away the F-35 might be to kill a Hornet before the Hornet even knew it was there?

Col Dave Burt: Indeed the numbers are classified, but we can say that the objective with a stealth aircraft is to be able, if necessary, to destroy the adversary aircraft before the adversary aircraft even knows you are there.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: We talked a bit about cost analysis of the in-service support with the F-18. Of course, we started flying the airplane in 1982, and we didn't sign a contract for the in-service support until 1986.

I would suggest that the kind of process we're going through now with the F-35 is not much different from what we've gone through with previous programs that have turned out rather well. It's part of the learning as you go process. Is that a fair statement?

Col Dave Burt: Indeed we are miles ahead of where we were at the same time in our new fighter aircraft project in terms of the understanding of the sustainment costs. We have a concept we intend to pursue. We understand we intend to pursue this collectively, which will give us the best value option for sustaining the aircraft for the long term, and we understand from the initial cost estimates that this will be affordable.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Through you, Mr. Chair, to Colonel Burt, we pay you, Mr. Ross, and all folks like you a fair amount of money to give us the best advice on whatever it is, based on your experience and knowledge.

This is a rhetorical question, but do you find it a bit odd that large groups of people don't seem to want to believe you? You can answer that in any way you like.

Col Dave Burt: I don't know if I would describe it as "odd"; it's perhaps a bit frustrating. It's the discussion that went on today.

We are a privileged nation among the other partners in the JSF program to have what's on offer. I often describe what's on offer as very impressive. I wish I could tell all of you the details of what's on offer. I'm not able to do that.

Indeed, as Mr. Hawn has suggested, it is a little disconcerting, perhaps frustrating, to the small group of people who have had the privilege of dealing with this level of information, understanding clearly that with these kinds of capabilities the best value option, the option that provides the best capability for the longest life at the least cost to Canada, is the F-35. It's a little disconcerting that we have to continuously reconfirm our convictions.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: As a professional officer and a very experienced person—and, again, this is a pretty rhetorical question—how devastating would it be to you and people you know and people who are counting on you if, while we're improving the process, as processes always need improving, we killed this program for the sake of improving a process that has already been approved well along? What would be the impact of killing this program?

Mr. Jack Harris: A point of order, Mr. Chairman.

We're happy to have the generals here, and asking questions is part of the democratic process. That is what our armed forces fight for: democracy. This is part of democracy. To suggest that asking questions of people who are highly intelligent, who are serving our country, and that we have an obligation to test that.... There's nothing wrong with that. To ask the generals and Colonel Burt to comment on this process I think is out of order for this committee. This is not what we're here for.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Chairman, it's a legitimate question to ask a professional military officer, who has lived with these kinds of programs throughout his career and is being followed by other younger people who are going to live with whatever decisions government makes, what the impact on the air force would be of killing this program.

The Chair: Yes. Okay.

Can you answer this question briefly?

LGen J.P.A. Deschamps: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think the reaction is frustration, because we know the value of this program, and it would be very disappointing to see Canada lose an opportunity to get what it needs at best cost. It would be disappointing to miss a very significant opportunity as a nation.

• (1725)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Bachand.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Chair, I understand that it can be frustrating to hold information that cannot be disclosed and then get an earful from a committee. However, I support what Mr. Harris has just said.

I sense another kind of discomfort. In fact, there is a direct relationship between the Conservative Party and these witnesses. I do not appreciate the fact that they are here with their files and are ready to support the parliamentary secretary.

I would like to remind you of one thing regarding the parliamentary secretary. In previous legislatures, when the Conservatives were in the opposition, they demanded that the Liberal parliamentary secretary be excluded. Their argument at the time was that the parliamentary secretary could not do impartial work because he was under the orders of the minister.

I do not appreciate that—and I think that everyone noticed this—they already have their charts ready to support him whenever the parliamentary secretary asks a question. I have nothing against them, because they must obey orders. However, I do object to what the parliamentary secretary and the government are doing.

I find such behaviour reprehensible, and we should not tolerate that here. The parliamentary secretary should come out and say that he will no longer use that type of approach with the Canadian Armed Forces.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hawn, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Chair, I absolutely reject that, completely and wholeheartedly. I am very familiar with this program; that's part of my job. I'm very familiar with aircraft and air power. Yes, I've known Colonel Burt for years. I know the kinds of questions we want answered, the kind of information we want to get out to the public, which is the truth about this program. So I'm going to ask questions.

I know him very well; he's a very thorough, well-prepared individual who is going to come to a meeting like this with all kinds of stuff. I don't know that he's bringing charts because those are the kinds of questions I want answered, because that is the kind of

information that needs to get to the Canadian public. It's the kind of information that you guys need to listen to, frankly, because you have some experts here.

Yes, I have some expertise in this, so I know the questions to ask. And yes, I have a pretty good idea of what he's going to say, because I know the program and I happen to know Colonel Burt. But what you're saying is absolutely false, and I object to it strenuously.

That's all I'll say. You are off base completely. You want to penalize me for having knowledge of the program and being able to ask the questions and get the answers the Canadian public needs to know. I'm not going to apologize for that and I'm not going to stop it.

Mr. Claude Bachand: I think I made my point.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Very well.

Mr. LeBlanc, you have the floor.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: I have another point of order. I asked Colonel Burt for the exact number of times that he and his staff visited Lockheed Martin, Boeing and the European officials of the Eurofighter. I can understand that he did not have a chart prepared to answer that question.

However, Mr. Chair, you might want to ask him to provide us with that information. I am not necessarily asking for a coloured chart, only something in writing. The numbers for 2009 and 2010 would be very useful. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. LeBlanc.

I would like to inform committee members that our budgets were approved this morning. We can therefore proceed as we had planned.

I would like to thank both of our witnesses, Lieutenant-General Deschamps and Colonel Burt.

[*English*]

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Do you know who's coming next?

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Our next meeting will be next Tuesday.

[*English*]

It will be an in camera meeting with the analysts. They are going to present to us the report we asked for after we received some answers from the government. We have to work with a sort of report.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: What is the topic?

The Chair: It's on arctic sovereignty.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

Thank you to our witnesses.

That ends the 30th meeting of the Standing Committee on National Defence.

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